

VZCZCXRO6396
RR RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHNM #0633/01 2442008
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 012008Z SEP 09
FM AMEMBASSY NIAMEY
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5289
INFO RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 1653
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEHLMC/MCC WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

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SUBJECT: Niger: Opposition Party Leaders Call on Ambassador

Ref: a) Niamey 630 b) Niamey 618 c) Niamey 609
d) Niamey 596 e) Niamey 584 f) Niamey 531
g) Niamey 375

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: On September 1, Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS) representatives, Niger's main opposition party, met with Ambassador Allen to discuss the country's current political developments. Embassy Political Assistant (note taker) also participated in the meeting. The PNDS leaders aired concerns about recent police violence against opposition supporters and denounced several violations of rights and democratic principles committed by the Government of Niger (GON). They called on the U.S. Government and the international community at large to support strong action against the GON at the upcoming extraordinary summit of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Heads of States and Government scheduled for September 5 in Abuja, Nigeria. Ambassador inquired about recent reports of fissures within the CFDR, such as reports that some parties will participate in the announced October 20 legislative elections. She asked for thoughts about Tandja's current visit to Libya, his first "official" travel out of the country since March 2008. (Note: Tandja did travel outside of Niger for medical treatment within the last year. End note.) End summary.

¶2. (SBU) On September 1, PNDS Vice President Bazoum Mohamed, the former National Assembly Third Vice President and a former Foreign Minister and PNDS Deputy Secretary General Hassoumi Massaoudou, former parliamentarian and a former Minister of Communication, met with Ambassador Allen at the Embassy. The discussion centered around the current political situation in Niger, and ways to press President Tandja to return the country to the democratic track. Following is a summary of the observations made by the two opposition figures.

¶3. (SBU) Mohamed, who added that he and Massaoudou were speaking on behalf of the opposition coalition, Coordination of Forces for Democracy and the Republic (CFDR), extended the CFDR's appreciation for the State Department's "clear, unequivocal stance taken through its August 13 statement rejecting the August 4 constitutional referendum." Further, he denounced the police repression used to quash an opposition rally on August 30 (ref a) and added that it was the most violent actions taken by security authorities since the beginning of the political crisis. He emphasized that the GON has a "dogged hatred" against the opposition, notably after the August 4 referendum. He stated, "Even people like the Prime Minister who,

pre-referendum, had been mostly moderate and lukewarm have become aggressive in criticizing the opposition."

¶4. (SBU) Regarding the announced October 20 legislative elections, Mohamed pointed out that some of the smaller political parties joined the Presidential camp because they believe that a boycott by stronger parties like PNDS, CDS, and ANDP will make it easier for the smaller parties to obtain some seats in the National Assembly. He reasserted the opposition stance that it "will not condone a coup and not give in to intimidation." He opined that "under Tandja's new plan, there will not be fair and transparent elections as we know them." He emphasized that there are no credible institutions to guarantee fair and transparent elections because "the new Constitutional Court, the Independent National Election Commission (CENI), and the High Council for Communication (CSC) cannot be trusted.

¶5. (SBU) Mohamed viewed the recent French statements "taking note" of the August 4 referendum and asking the parties to sit down and negotiate the terms for the announced October 20 National Assembly elections as unsupportive to the opposition's attempts to restore democracy. He was especially concerned about the possibility that the French may influence the European Union (EU) in reconsidering the firm position it has taken previously. He urged the USG, the EU, ECOWAS, and the international community at large to adopt "a posture of non-recognition of any institutions derived from Tandja's constitution. He said, "The struggle may be long, but in the end we, the opposition, will win." Mohamed suggested that even the military and other security forces "may join democratic forces and act in order to restore the democratic framework", if they see a lack of support in the international community for the Tandja regime.

¶6. (SBU) Mohamed was encouraged that Nigeria, unlike some ECOWAS countries, has shown "great determination" in support for

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constitutional order in Niger. However, he deplored the "low level" of the ECOWAS delegation that visited Niger on August 30-31 (ref a), and the Nigerian Deputy Foreign Minister's allegations in an interview in Hausa that "Niger's opposition does not wish sanctions against their country." (Note: The Nigerian Ambassador, who has been in country two months, is still waiting to present his credentials to the GON. End note.)

¶7. (SBU) Mohamed expressed concern over President Tandja's trip to Libya on August 30. He suggested that Tandja would seek opportunities during the AU Summit on conflict and climate change and the Libyan leader's celebration of 40 years in power, together with his current incumbency as AU Chairman, to lobby for support. He urged the U.S. to support ECOWAS and urge Nigerian President Yar Adua "who has shown signs of firmness about the situation in Niger" to hold on to his position. He also suggested that, in light of President Obama's speech during his recent visit to Ghana that Ghanaian President Mills also may be a useful ally. He recommended that the USG use its influence in the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) as a pressure point, suggested that the IFIs should be "monitor the GON's extravagant spending."

¶8. (SBU) Massaoudou commented that during the August 4 referendum, the Office of the Army Chief of Staff created an "election monitoring team" which noted "only a 5 percent voter turnout." According to him, the monitoring team also reported that 89 percent of the army voted against the referendum. He concluded that "this is a clear indication that contradicts the army's alleged support for the President's continuation plan." He downplayed reports of dissensions within the CFDR. He said that the opposition's stronghold is made up four larger political parties: PNDS, CDS, ANDP, and MODEN Lumana.

¶9. (SBU) Ambassador thanked the CFDR representatives for the visit, assured them that the USG still supports efforts to return Niger on a democratic path. She added it is important for African institutions such as ECOWAS and the AU take a more active role to defend democracy in Niger, the sub-region and the continent. She closed the meeting by stating she would convey the CFDR message to Washington and noted that the USG has a keen interest in actions

that result from the upcoming ECOWAS extraordinary summit in Abuja.

ALLEN